

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

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AMEMBASSY ROME

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BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

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GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, UR

SUBJECT: JOINT SYRIAN/SOVIET COMMUNIQUE

1. SUMMARY: DESPITE THE SEEMINGLY HARD LANGUAGE USED IN THE SYRIAN/SOVIET COMMUNIQUE, FROM DAMASCUS AT LEAST IT DOES NOT APPEAR AS THOUGH SYRIAN/SOVIET RELATIONS HAVE MOVED ONTO A NEW INTRANSIGENT LEVEL BODING ILL FOR THE FUTURE, AS SOME LOCAL FOREIGN DIPLOMATS AND VISITING NEWSPAPERMEN NOW FEAR. WHILE NOT AN ADEPT AT KREMLINOLOGY, A READING OF SOME OF THE KEY CLAUSES IN THE COMMUNIQUE WOULD INDICATE THAT THE SYRIANS CHOOSING THEIR WORDS CAREFULLY WERE NOT SANDBAGGED BY THE SOVIETS AND POSSIBLY GOT MORE OUT OF THE SOVIETS THAN THE SOVIETS OUT OF THE SYRIANS. END SUMMARY

2. BOTH LOCAL NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED THE COMPLETE ARABIC TEXT OF THE JOINT SYRIAN/SOVIET COMMUNIQUE ON APRIL 17. THUSFAR THERE HAS BEEN NO EDITORIAL COMMENT. I AM NOT A KREMLINOLOGIST AND, THEREFORE, AM NOT IN A POSITION TO COMMENT ON THE NUANCES WHICH MAY BE QUITE APPARENT TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN STUDYING THE DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE EMANATING FROM MOSCOW OVER THE YEARS. THE LENGTH OF THE COMMUNIQUE STRUCK ME, HOWEVER, PARTICULARLY WHEN AFTER READING IT IN THE ARABIC TEXT, IT DID NOT SEEM TO BREAK NEW GROUND. DESPITE THE VERBIAGE, THE SOVIETS AND THE SYRIANS ARE STILL TALKING ABOUT RETURN OF THE ARAB TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN 1967, ALBEIT ALL OF THEM, AND OF RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS. MOREOVER, WHILE NOT AS EXPLICIT AS PERHAPS WE WOULD LIKE, I DID NOT READ ANY REPUDIATION OF PEACEFUL MEANS TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS. BOTH PARTIES ALSO PRAISE ONE ANOTHER FOR SYRIAN FORTITUDE ON ONE HAND AND SOVIET GENEROSITY ON THE OTHER.

3. I NOTE THE APPEARANCE OF THE PHRASE "THE DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD IN A SPIRIT OF FRANKNESS," WHICH AS I UNDERSTAND HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SIGN IN MOST SOVIET COMMUNIQUE THAT BOTH SIDES HAD OPINIONS WHICH DID NOT NECESSARILY

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COINCIDE. MAYBE THE LENGTH OF THE COMMUNIQUE WAS DESIGNED TO COVER THIS FACT. IN ANY EVENT, FROM MY VANTAGE POINT IN DAMASCUS, I DO NOT SEE THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE GIVEN THE SOVIETS VERY MUCH. WHEREAS IT APPEARS TO ME THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE GIVEN THE SYRIANS MORE, PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN OBVIOUS EFFORT TO MAINTAIN THEIR POSITION IN THE AREA.

4. THE KEY SECTIONS, AS I SEE THEM, ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A. THE TWO SIDES "AGREED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PARTICIPATION OF THE SOVIET UNION IN ALL STAGES AND ASPECTS RELATING TO A SOLUTION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JUST AND LASTING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST." IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THERE IS A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AGREEING ON THE "IMPORTANCE" OF PARTICIPATION AS CONTRASTED BY AGREEING FLATLY AND UNEQUIVACABLY TO THE PARTICIPATION. THE SYRIANS CAN SAY TRUTHFULLY THAT IT IS "IMPORTANT" FOR THE SOVIETS TO PARTICIPATE WITHOUT NECESSARILY INSISTING ON THEIR ACTUAL PARTICIPATION IN THE DISENGAGEMENT PHASE. THE SOVIETS, OF COURSE, CAN USE THIS LANGUAGE AGAINST US IF THEY BELIEVE THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH IT BUT THE FACT REMAINS AND EVERYONE KNOWS IT THAT THE SOVIETS CAN HARDLY PARTICIPATE IN THE DISENGAGEMENT PHASE IN THE ABSENCE OF RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL.

B. "THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY, THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT AND THE SOVIET PEOPLE, AFFIRMS THAT THE SOVIET UNION WILL CONTINUE IN THE FUTURE TO PROVIDE COMPLETE SUPPORT TO THE JUST ARAB CAUSE." PRESUMABLY THIS RUBRIC CAN BE INTERPRETED TO MEAN THAT THE SOVIET UNION WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE ARMS (AND OTHER ASSISTANCE) TO THE SYRIANS AND TO ANYBODY ELSE IN THE ARAB WORLD WHO WANTS THEM, FOR A PRICE, OF COURSE. HERE AGAIN I DO NOT SEE THAT THIS MARKS ANY MAJOR ESCALATION IN SOVIET SUPPORT FOR SYRIA. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT PROVIDES THE SYRIANS WITH AN ASSURED CHANNEL OF MILITARY SUPPORT WHICH IN TURN MEANS THAT THE SYRIANS CAN CONTINUE THEIR PSYCHO-POLITICAL PRESSURES ON THE GOLAN. FINALLY, I ALSO NOTE THAT THE WORDS OF SOVIET SUPPORT COME FROM CONFIDENTIAL

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THE MOUTH OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY AND NOT FROM THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT AND I WONDER IF THIS IS NOT SIGNIFICANT AS IMPLYING LESS THAN FULL SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THE SYRIANS.

C. "SYRIA AND THE SOVIET UNION STRONGLY DISAPPROVE OF THE ATTEMPTS OF THE AGGRESSIVE AND REACTIONARY FORCES WHICH AIM TO STRAIN RELATIONS BETWEEN STATES AND TO INCREASE TENSION AND, THEREFORE, DECLARE THAT THEY WILL MAKE NECESSARY EFFORTS TO OPPOSE THESE AGGRESSIVE FORCES WHICH THREATEN THE COURSE OF PEACE." THIS MAY WELL BE A VEILED WARNING TO EGYPT AND THOSE IN THAT COUNTRY WHO ARE OPENLY ATTACKING SOVIET/ARAB FRIENDSHIP. THIS MAY ALSO REPRESENT A SYRIAN CONCESSION TO SOVIET SENSIBILITIES.

5. IN CONCLUSION, I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT ANYTHING HAS
CHANGED IN DAMASCUS DESPITE ASAD'S TRIP TO MOSCOW
AND THE LONG TURGID COMMUNIQUE WHICH RESULTED FROM
IT, ALTHOUGH SOME LOCAL FOREIGN DIPLOMATS AND VISITING NEWSPAPERMEN
ARE NOT SO CERTAIN AND ARE PREDICTING DIRE TROUBLE FOR
OUR PEACE EFFORTS. WHILE NOT WANTING TO MINIMIZE THE
POTENTIAL FOR SOVIET TROUBLE-MAKING IN THE AREA AND
PARTICULARLY IN SYRIA, I WOULD WELCOME NONETHELESS
HEARING FROM MY SOVIET AREA COLLEAGUES WHO MAY BE
ABLE TO SEE IN THIS COMMUNIQUE MORE SINISTER HARBINGERS
THAN I CAN.
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